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TEXT OF TELEGRAM 89SAN SA015833

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ACTION ARA-00

INFD	LOG-00	ADS-00	AID-00	INR-05	SS-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00
	H-01	NSCE-00	NSAE-00	SSO-00	HA-09	L-03	TRSE-00
	PM-10	PA-02	OMB-01	INRE-00	ACDA-12	SP-02	SNP-01
	C-01	PRS-01	P-02	T-01	/051 W		

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O 072310Z DEC 89
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3848
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 4182

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 15833

USIA FOR AR, P/G
STATE FOR ARA/CEN, ARA/P, PA

E.O. 12356 N/A
TAGS: OPRC, SCOM, PGOV, PREL, US, ES
SUBJECT: THE AMERICAN MEDIA VIS-A-VIS EL SALVADOR

REF: A. HOWARD/DANCE, JACOBS/HOWARD TELCOMS OF 12/7/89,
B. SAN SALVADOR 15596 (C)

BACKGROUND

1. EVEN BEFORE THE CURRENT FMLN OFFENSIVE BEGAN ON NOVEMBER 11, EL SALVADOR AS A POLICY ISSUE OCCUPIED A UNIQUE POSITION IN THE AMERICAN PSYCHE. THOSE WHO SUPPORT U.S. POLICY AND THE EFFORTS OF THE GOES TO BUILD A WORKING AND VIABLE DEMOCRACY, WHILE NUMEROUS ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN A BIPARTISAN CONGRESSIONAL CONSENSUS, ARE RESTRAINED AND CAUTIOUS. THE PROBLEMS THAT STILL PLAGUE EL SALVADOR, AND THE MEMORY OF THE HORRORS THAT AFFLICTED THIS SMALL COUNTRY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DECADE, SERVE TO LIMIT ENTHUSIASM. ON THE OTHER SIDE, UNCLASSIFIED
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THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS POLICY HAVE THE VEHEMENCE AND THE INTELLECTUAL CERTITUDE OF THE "TRUE BELIEVER." FOR THESE PEOPLE, SALVADOR IS NOT A POLITICAL PROBLEM, OR EVEN A SPECIFIC PARCEL OF POOR AND OVER-CROWDED REAL ESTATE; IT IS A MORALITY PLAY. ITS VILLAINS -- TOTAL AND UNREDEEMABLE -- ARE THE OLIGARCHY, THE MILITARY, AND THE CALLOUS AMERICAN BUREAUCRATS WHO SUPPORT THEM. ITS HEROES -- PURE AND UNBURDENED BY POLITICAL SELF-INTEREST -- ARE THE POOR AND NOBLE CAMPESINOS.

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IDEALISTIC CHURCH ACTIVISTS, OPPRESSED LABOR LEADERS, AND BRAVE FOREIGNERS WHO LABOR ON BEHALF OF THE DOWNTRODDEN. IT IS ONLY IN THE PAST YEAR THAT A SERIES OF BRUTAL ASSASSINATIONS -- OF MAYORS, POLITICIANS, AND CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS -- HAS FINALLY STRIPPED THE FMLN OF ITS MYTHIC ROBIN HOOD IMAGE.

- (A) COVERAGE

2. THE COVERAGE OF THE WAR, PARTICULARLY BY THE INTERNATIONAL ELECTRONIC MEDIA WITH ITS DEMAND FOR GOOD "VISUALS," HAS INTENSIFIED THIS DISTORTION. THE WRITTEN MEDIA, PARTICULARLY THOSE WITH PERMANENT SAN SALVADOR-BASED SPANISH SPEAKING REPRESENTATIVES, I.E., THE WASHINGTON POST, NEW YORK TIMES, MIAMI HERALD, NEWSWEEK, ETC., HAVE GENERALLY REPORTED THE WAR ACCURATELY, AND HAVE AT LEAST MADE AN HONEST ATTEMPT AT OBJECTIVITY.

3. THE MOST DISTORTED IMAGES HAVE COME FROM THE TELEVISION NETWORKS, WITH CNN THE MOST CONSPICUOUS (AND THE ONLY ONE WE ARE ABLE TO REGULARLY MONITOR) OFFENDER. THEIR COVERAGE, AS TYPICAL OF THE MEDIUM,
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TENDS TO REDUCE THE REALITY TO BLACK OR WHITE SIMPLICITY, WHILE LEAVING ALL THE GRAY AREAS ASIDE. THE VISUAL IMPACT OF COMBAT FOOTAGE AND IMPOVERISHED CAMPESESINOS ALSO FOSTERS A LEBANON-LIKE IMAGE, WITHOUT COUNTERBALANCING IMAGES OF A THRIVING MIDDLE CLASS AND THE RAPID URBAN DEVELOPMENT THAT ILLUSTRATES THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SALVADORAN STORY.

- OUR REALITY

4. WHAT WE SEE HERE IN EL SALVADOR IS A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT, ELECTED WITH OVER 53 OF THE VOTE IN AN ELECTION JUDGED "FAIR AND FREE," THAT HAD JOINED WITH THE FMLN IN A PROCESS OF DIALOG (AND IN WHICH EACH SIDE HAD ASSURED THAT IT WOULD NOT UNILATERALLY WITHDRAW) TO ARRIVE AT A PEACEFUL -- BUT CONSTITUTIONALLY LEGITIMATE -- SOLUTION TO A BLOODY TEN-YEAR OLD INSURGENCY, STRUGGLING TO CONTAIN AN ARMED INCURSION INTO ITS CAPITAL CITY, AS WELL AS INTO SMALLER INTERIOR POPULATION CENTERS.

5. WE SEE AN FMLN, BLATANTLY SUPPLIED WITH SOVIET DESIGNED WEAPONS PROVIDED BY CUBA VIA NICARAGUA (AND IN VIOLATION OF SEVERAL CENTRAL AMERICAN AGREEMENTS), BRINGING BETWEEN TWO AND THREE THOUSAND HEAVILY ARMED COMBATANTS INTO SAN SALVADOR. WE SEE A SELF-PROCLAIMED

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MARXIST-LENINIST GROUP ATTACKING THE RESIDENCES OF
PRESIDENT CRISTIANI -- ATTEMPTING TO MURDER HIM, HIS
WIFE, AND CHILDREN, VIOLATING ITS OWN PROMISE BY
WITHDRAWING FROM THE DIALOG PROCESS, USING HIGH-POWERED
WEAPONS IN A DENSE URBAN ENVIRONMENT -- WITH ONE OF ITS
FIRST VICTIMS A 26 YEAR OLD AMERICAN SCHOOL TEACHER, AND
THEN PURPOSELY PLACING ITS COMBATANTS BEHIND A SHIELD OF

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	H-01	NSCE-00	NSAE-00	SSO-00	HA-09	L-03	TRSE-00
	PM-10	PA-02	OMB-01	INRE-00	ACDA-12	SP-02	SNP-01
	C-01	PRS-01	P-02	T-01	/051 W		

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3849
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UNCLAS SECTION 02 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 15833

USIA FOR AR, P/G
STATE FOR ARA/CEN, ARA/P, PA

E.O. 12356 N/A
TAGS: OPRC, SCOM, PGDV, PREL, US, ES
SUBJECT: THE AMERICAN MEDIA VIS-A-VIS EL SALVADOR

INNOCENT CIVILIANS, AND ALL THE WHILE BABBLING ABOUT
HUMAN RIGHTS.

6. MILITARILY, WE SEE A SALVADORAN MILITARY (ESAF) THAT
HAS FOUGHT WELL, BUT HAS FAILED UNTIL RECENTLY TO GO
STRONGLY ON THE OFFENSIVE. THE FMLN HAS NOT OVERRUN OR
BADLY DAMAGED A SINGLE, RPT SINGLE, ESAF INSTALLATION,
AND HAS SUFFERED CASUALTIES AT A RATIO OF 3:1. WE SEE A
SALVADORAN AIR FORCE (FAES) THAT HAS GENERALLY
RESTRAINED ITS USE OF AERIAL FIREPOWER AND THAT HAS NOT
-- SO FAR -- LOST A SINGLE AIRCRAFT TO THE SOVIET SA-7'S
INTRODUCED BY NICARAGUA (BUT HAS LOST THREE AIRCRAFT TO
CONVENTIONAL GROUNDFIRE).

7. WE NOW SEE VIA RECENT INFORMATION, AN FMLN THAT
PLANNED THIS AS ITS (SECOND) FINAL OFFENSIVE, AND BASED
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THIS EXPECTATION ON A POPULAR UPRISING THAT DID NOT
HAPPEN. WE SEE AN FMLN THAT HAS TAKEN SERIOUS
CASUALTIES, AND IS TRYING TO REPLACE THESE LOSSES BY
KIDNAPPING CHILDREN AND OTHER CIVILIANS, THAT HAS NOT
ONLY USED OR LOST AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF WEAPONS AND
MUNITIONS, BUT IN ITS PUSH FOR A FINAL VICTORY HAS
UNMASKED A CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED NETWORK OF SO-CALLED
POPULAR AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, SAFEHOUSES, ETC.

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THE DISTORTION

8. THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA, AND A CASUAL READING OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS, PRESENTS AN IMAGE OF EL SALVADOR AS LEBANON, THAT IS, OF A NATION SO FRACTURED AND VIOLENT THAT, AT BEST, THERE IS A MORAL EQUIVALENCY BETWEEN THE FMLN AND THE GOVERNMENT. THE GOES IS NOT PORTRAYED AS DEFENDING ITSELF AND ITS POPULATION FROM ATTACK; IT IS PORTRAYED INSTEAD AS THE UNPROVOKED INITIATORS OF REPRESSIVE, VICIOUS ASSAULTS ON ITS CITIZENS. IT IS NOT RESPONDING TO (PERHAPS IMAGINED OR EXAGGERATED BUT NEVERTHELESS FRIGHTENING) REPORTS OF "INTERNACIONALISTAS" FIGHTING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE FMLN, BUT RATHER LAUNCHING A DIABOLICAL ASSAULT ON CHURCH AND HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS. AT TIMES, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO KNOW FROM THE MEDIA COVERAGE THAT THE FMLN IS EVEN A PARTY TO THE CURRENT SITUATION. IMAGES OF REFUGEES, DAMAGED BUILDINGS, DEAD SOLDIERS, ETC. ARE OFFERED AS THOUGH THEY EXIST INDEPENDENT OF THE GUERRILLA'S ATTACK ON POPULATION CENTERS.

9. IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT SOME OF THE BLAME FOR THESE DISTORTIONS RESTS WITH THE GOES ITSELF. ITS OWN INFORMATION EFFORTS WERE LATE IN STARTING, HEAVY HANDED.
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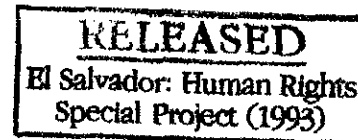
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AND FREQUENTLY COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. ITS OWN SUSPICIONS AND DISTRUST OF THE INTERNATIONAL, AND EVEN ITS OWN, PRESS HAVE MADE RELATIONS WITH THE MEDIA PRICKLY. ITS REPRESENTATIVES ABROAD ARE FREQUENTLY OUTGUNNED AND OUTMANNED BY THE OPPOSITION. PRESIDENT CRISTIANI SHOULD HAVE INCLUDED, AND PERHAPS WILL INCLUDE, REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES IN HIS DECISION MAKING APPARATUS. THE DECISION TO FUNNEL ALL INFORMATION THROUGH A "NATIONAL INFORMATION CENTER" WAS ILL-ADVISED AT BEST, AND GAVE A FREE PLAY TO THE FMLN'S EFFECTIVE "RADIO VENCEREMOS," AS WELL AS TO THE EXAGGERATION AND DISTORTION OF RUMOR AND GOSSIP THAT HAACAUSED CONSIDERABLE DISCOMFORT, AT TIMES APPROACHING PANIC, AMONG THE GENERAL POPULACE.

(B) THE POST, THE AGENCY, AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

10. THE OBVIOUS ANTIDOTE TO THE ABOVE IS INFORMATION. USIS HAS WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE REST OF THE MISSION, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY WITH AMBASSADOR WALKER, TO BRIEF THE PRESS ALMOST DAILY. SOMETIMES THIS HAS BEEN IN OPEN PRESS CONFERENCES, OTHER TIMES ON BACKGROUND, AND ALMOST CONSTANT ONE-ON-ONES WITH JOURNALISTS IN PERSON OR ON THE TELEPHONE. WE ARE USING THE MATERIAL PROVIDED BY WASHINGTON, I.E., WIRELESS FILE, WORLDNET, STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFINGS, AS WELL AS OUR OWN SELF-GENERATED

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PRODUCTS. WE ARE ALSO WORKING WITH OUR SALVADORAN
COUNTERPARTS; CLOSELY WITH THE MILITARY SPOKESMAN
(COPREFA), LESS SUCCESSFULLY WITH MAURICIO SANDOVAL, THE
CIVILIAN NATIONAL SECRETARY FOR INFORMATION. A
SALVADORAN OFFICER, CAPT. SALVADOR GIRALT, WHO RETURNED
LAST WEEK AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE AGENCY'S IV MRP
"AMERICAN BROADCAST MEDIA," HAS JUST BEEN ASSIGNED (AT
EMBASSY SUGGESTION) TO COPREFA AND IS NOW ITS DEPUTY
SPOKESMAN. HE WILL FILL A VITAL NEED AS THE ONLY GOES
INFORMATION OFFICIAL, CIVILIAN OR MILITARY, ABLE TO
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BRIEF THE PRESS IN ENGLISH.

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	PM-10	PA-02	OMB-01	INRE-00	ACDA-12	SP-02	SNP-01
	C-01	PRS-01	P-02	T-01	/051 W		

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TO USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3850
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UNCLAS SECTION 03 OF 03 SAN SALVADOR 15833

USIA FOR AR, P/G
STATE FOR ARA/CEN, ARA/P, PA

E.O. 12356 N/A
TAGS: DPRC, SCOM, PGOV, PREL, US, ES
SUBJECT: THE AMERICAN MEDIA VIS-A-VIS EL SALVADOR

11. THE AGENCY HAS PROVIDED GOOD SUPPORT. WE CAN USE WF ARTICLES, OFFICIAL TEXTS, WORLDNETS, ETC. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE SALVADORAN PUBLIC, THE ESAF, AND EVEN THE FMLN, NOT DOUBT AMERICAN CONSTANCY AND OUR COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE OF DEMOCRACY.

12. IT WOULD BE OF ENORMOUS IMPORT IF THE DEPARTMENT AND/OR USIA CAN INTEREST SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AS FREEDOM HOUSE AND THE AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE IN PREPARING REPORTS AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION ON THE CURRENT SITUATION.

13. WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE USEFUL IF THE GOES HAD PROFESSIONAL HELP IN SETTING-UP A MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND EFFICIENT PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM. ONE POSSIBILITY
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WE SUGGEST, WITHOUT HAVING VETTED IT WITH THE GOES ITSELF, WOULD BE FOR A FLUENT SPANISH SPEAKING RETIRED AGENCY OFFICER TO COME TO SAN SALVADOR TO WORK WITH THE GOVERNMENT AS AN ADVISOR. THIS IS A SUGGESTION; WE DO NOT KNOW HOW THIS WOULD BE FUNDED, WE DO KNOW THAT THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE A REAL DISTANCE BETWEEN THIS ADVISOR AND THE EMBASSY ITSELF.

(C) THE BOOMERANG EFFECT

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14. THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE WASHINGTON POST, THE MIAMI HERALD, AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL ARE FOR SALE IN EL SALVADOR THE DAY AFTER PUBLICATION, AS ARE THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINES. CNN IS BROADCAST VIA TWO PRIVATE "CABLE" (ACTUALLY UHF BROADCAST DISTRIBUTION) COMPANIES, AND LOCAL TELEVISION CHANNEL 12 WAS, AND HAS RESUMED,, BROADCASTING A SPANISH SUBTITLED HALF-HOUR OF THE CBS NIGHTLY NEWS WITH DAN RATHER.

15. THE EFFECT OF THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN, AS WE SEE IT, TWOFOLD. FIRST, WHEN THE GOES CLUMSILY BLANKED OUT CNN, AS WELL AS TEMPORARILY CENSORING THE LOCAL NEWSCASTS ON TELEVISION AND RADIO, THE FEELING AMONG THE LOCAL POPULATION, AND PARTICULARLY THE UPPER CLASSES, WAS THAT "THE SITUATION MUST BE WORSE THAN WE ARE BEING TOLD, OR WHY ELSE WOULD THE GOVERNMENT BE CUTTING OFF THIS OUTSIDE NEWS?"

16. SECOND, FOR THOSE WHO HAVE ACCESS TO OUTSIDE MEDIA, THERE IS A FEELING THAT THE "WHOLE WORLD IS AGAINST US", AND PARTICULARLY THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS. THIS HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE SOMETIMES UNPRODUCTIVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOES AND THE PRESS, BOTH DOMESTIC AND
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FOREIGN. WE, THAT IS THE MISSION AND PARTICULARLY USIS, THE CONSULAR SECTION, AND AMBASSADOR WALKER, SPEND TIME WE DO NOT HAVE GETTING JOURNALISTS RELEASED BY MILITARY UNITS, INTERVENING WITH THE SECURITY FORCES, ETC. BEYOND THE ILL WILL GENERATED AND THE TIME LOST, THESE IRRITATIONS AND HARASSMENTS TEND TO SHIFT MANY OF THE JOURNALISTS' FOCUS FROM THE ACTIONS OF THE FMLN AND ITS MILITARY OFFENSIVE, TOWARDS ISOLATED, CLUMSILY HANDLED INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENTS THAT INEVITABLY EVOKE DARK REMINDERS OF EARLY-80'S SALVADOR. THESE INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENT OR WORSE SHOULD NOT GO UNREPORTED OR UNREDRESSED, BUT IN MOST CASES THERE IS FAR MORE SMOKE THAN FIRE. IT IS OUR CHALLENGE, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY THE CHALLENGE OF THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT, TO KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE MAIN STORY:

- I.E., AN ELECTED CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY FIGHTING
- TO BEAT OFF AN ASSAULT DESIGNED TO TOPPLE IT BY
- MARXIST GUERRILLAS. JACOBS

